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Role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and other related fields

Letter dated 23 September 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 23 September 1998 addressed to you from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. I. S. Ivanov (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 63.

(*Signed*) Sergei **Lavrov**

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Annex

Letter dated 23 September 1998 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation addressed to the Secretary-General

For a number of years, the General Assembly has been considering at its sessions the item entitled "Role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and other related fields". We believe that this issue is still topical; moreover, it has recently begun to acquire new meaning as a result of the qualitatively new stage of the scientific and technological revolution that is occurring throughout the world: the rapid development and application of new information technologies and means of telecommunication.

The information revolution, which affects virtually all aspects of modern life, is opening up broad prospects for the rapid and harmonious development of world civilization, expanding opportunities for mutually advantageous cooperation among States and is sharply increasing mankind's creative potential. Today it is possible to talk about the formation of a truly global information area for the international community, in which information is taking on the attributes of the most valuable element of both national and universal property, its strategic resource.

At the same time, it is essential to consider the – perhaps for the time being only potential but nevertheless serious – threat of developments in the information field being used for purposes incompatible with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security, the observance of the principles of non-use of force, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for human rights and freedoms. In our opinion, such a threat requires that preventive measures be taken today. We cannot permit the emergence of a fundamentally new area of international confrontation, which may lead to an escalation of the arms race based on the latest developments of the scientific and technological revolution and, as a result, divert an enormous amount of resources that are so necessary for peaceful creativity and development.

I am referring to the creation of information weapons and the threat of information wars, which we understand as actions taken by one country to damage the information resources and systems of another country while at the same time protecting its own infrastructure.

The unprecedented level of information available to the public and, at the same time, the vulnerability of a society's information structure has lead to the risk of the emergence of such an information weapon, the destructive "effect" of which may be comparable to that of weapons of mass destruction.

In these circumstances, there is a real threat that information resources may be used for terrorist or criminal purposes, the consequences of which may be disastrous.

All these apprehensions lead us to the conclusion that the time has come for the question of international information security to be a topic for substantive and purposeful discussion in the United Nations.

I request that you consider this letter as an explanatory memorandum, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, and circulate it together with the attached draft resolution (see appendix) as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 63.

(*Signed*) I. **Ivanov**

Appendix

Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security

Russian Federation: draft resolution

The *General Assembly*,

Recalling its resolutions on the role of science and technology in the context of international security in which, *inter alia*, it recognized that scientific and technological developments could have both civilian and military applications and that progress in science and technology for civilian applications needed to be maintained and encouraged,

Acknowledging with satisfaction that considerable progress has been achieved in developing and applying the latest information technologies and means of telecommunication,

Affirming that it sees in this process the broadest positive opportunities for the further development of civilization, the expansion of opportunities for cooperation among States, the enhancement of mankind's creative potential and the formation of a global information area for the international community,

Recalling in this connection the approaches and principles for creating such a community, which were outlined at the international Conference on the Information Society and Development, held in Midrand, South Africa, in 1996,

Noting that the dissemination and use of information technologies and means affect the interests of the entire international community and their optimum inventory is possible only in the context of broad international cooperation,

Expressing concern that these technologies and means may potentially be used for purposes incompatible with the objectives of ensuring international security and stability and the observance of the principles of non-use of force, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for human rights and freedoms,

Considering it also necessary to prevent the emergence of information technologies and means whose military applications may be compared to the use of weapons of mass destruction,

Concerned that new information technologies may be used to improve existing weapons of mass destruction or create new systems of such weapons,

Expressing the anxiety that the scale and, at the same time, vulnerability of the global information structure poses the real threat that it may be used for terrorist or criminal purposes, the results of which may be disastrous,

1. *Proposes* that States Members of the United Nations increase their consideration at the bilateral and multilateral levels of existing and potential threats in the field of information security;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General and United Nations bodies to provide assistance in this process;

3. *Invites* all Member States to inform the Secretary-General of their views and assessments concerning the following questions:

(a) overall view of problems related to the use of information technologies for miliary purposes;

(b) definition of the concepts "information weapon", and "information war", and other hostile or unsanctioned use of information and telecommunications systems and information resources;

(c) advisability of developing international legal regimes to prohibit the development, production or use of particularly dangerous forms of information weapons, and of taking measures to combat information terrorism and crime, including the establishment of an international system (centre) for monitoring threats to the security of global information and telecommunications systems;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to summarize the views and assessments concerning problems of information security and to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session;

5. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fourth session the item entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security".